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ABSTRACT

The United States has been regarded as the "melting pot" of cultures when it actually has been a "scrap pile" of cultures refusing to melt. In this setting there is a constant struggle to reach solutions to community problems with much attention given to dominant group needs and little given to other-group needs. Although the best opportunities for solutions to community problems are through public education, it suffers from the same forces that resist change in the larger society. As in the larger society, national concerns are constantly being diverted to new, overbearing crises while the old are ignored. Such has been the case with desegregation. Blacks have been treated as caste minorities and given an education that does not prepare them for the same adult roles as those available to whites. The consequences of this disparity make it a moral issue. The most certain way to build confidence in the school desegregation process is to involve community citizens. The present is a good time to use redistricting to achieve desegregation because economic conditions have slowed "white flight". Complete desegregation is the major step toward providing equal opportunity in the classroom and in the real world. (Author/IRT)

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CONTINUING ISSUES IN SCHOOL DESEGREGATION: IMPLICATIONS TO ADMINISTRATORS AND RESEARCHERS

"SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES"

A Paper

Presented At The

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The United States has been regarded as the "melting pot" of cultures, when actually it has been a "scrap pile" of cultures refusing to melt. The copper, silver, iron and gold retain their group characteristics while collectively existing in the human classification. The gold (dominant group) in the pile carefully guards the temperature of the environment so as to avoid too much mixing. The consequence of this kind of a society is constant struggling to reach acceptable solutions to community problems with much attention to dominant-membership-needs and little attention to other group-needs.

This effort is further limited by the restrictions of the power structure which continue to be perceived as a mysterious and unapproachable ghost emanating from city hall, school administration building and state and federal capitols. The complexities of such a society generate a perpetuating arrangement whereby problems are simply defined, created and discussed—not solved. Leaders create problems by discussing them, and then mount programs to perpetuate the same. They would better spend their time eliminating problems than focusing continuously on the whys and hows of their existence. Educators and scholars alike are notorious for the latter. The best opportunity for the solution of social problems is through public education. However, it must be recognized that the same forces exist in public education that exist in the larger society.

A consideration of the present conditions in education requires

basic comprehension of the dichotomy that permeates American society. The political, economical and social institutions, in their quarterbacking roles, tend to divert and redirect national concerns by conveniently presenting a new and overbearing crisis. Therefore, this procedure of evolving crises allows for a few gains to be made in each, but complete solution or eradication is rendered impossible. This is observable throughout our history as woman suffrage has not solved the problem of equality of the sexes; the War on Poverty has not eradicated poverty; Brown vs. Board of Education has not solved the school desegregation matter; nor have the numerous Civil Rights Acts solved the race problem.

In this context then, it may be concluded that the emphasis in the late sixties on urban education was largely rescinded by attention to Viet Nam, ecology, Women's Liberation, law and order, Watergate, and certainly President Nixon. Additionally, current thought and action in urban schooling must address the powerful forces of a depressed economy in the grips of an alleged energy crisis. The national interest in desegregation is all but dead despite the fact that little improvement surfaced during the short-lived renaissance. Desegregation was reified for a few years but remains today as "vacuum ideology." The question of whether this hoax was planned or occurred naturally is purely academic. The fact is that attention to desegregation has been supplanted. The human tragedy involved in this matter is incomprehensible.

Many school children who were to be affected by the Brown vs.

Board of Education decision are now parents of children who attend American schools. These thousands of school children, twenty-seven years later, are still largely unaffected by the Brown decision. They attend school in racial isolation and are receiving what must be regarded as inferior education. Although most of these persons are black, many are also Hispanic and white. They all share an imposed attitude of caste minorities.[1]

The Brown decision was designed to reduce and eliminate these attitudes. The language in the decision of "all deliberate speed"[2] has been reduced to delaying, distracting and distorting speed, for the promise of fully desegregated schools is largely empty. The political process at every level has failed to effectively commemorate the democratic freedom and equality of school desegregation. Twenty-seven years after this landmark decision, caste minorities in this nation are still faced with the dire straits of social, economic and political uncertainty.

Because American society treats blacks as caste minorities, black education does not serve as a bridge to the same adult roles as those available to whites on the basis of education. Hence, inferior education offered to blacks is the first step of channeling them away from the more desirable roles in society. The history of black education in the United States is one of exclusion through overt and subtle mechanisms from the high quality education received by whites. Ogbu rightfully observes that the dominant group usually regards caste minorities as inherently inferior in all respects. Opponents of desegregation refuse to acknowledge the

reality that the use of inferior education to prepare caste minorities for adult life is directly related to the disparity between blacks and whites in occupational status, and that caste status determines access to both education and jobs.[3]

The American democracy is sharply divided by race and class, just as it was cogently reported four decades ago my Myrdal.[4] Black unemployment is two and a half times the rate of white unemployment, and still soaring. The high school dropout rate for blacks approaches fifty percent. Black unemployment in 1979 was twenty-five percent higher than it was in 1954. Black Americans made up thirty percent of all those who were drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, but are conspicuously missing in leadership positions in merged school districts and head coaching positions in professional athletics. Adding to the problem has been a propensity by most Americans to depress, deny and dislike such statistical rhetoric.

These and other similar statistics of dispair for blacks and other minorities attest to the fact that this is a moral issue. When one-third of the poor are drawn from one-tenth of the population, that is indeed a moral issue for the American society. Whether the national economy is slumping, advancing or recovering, a significant number of blacks always remain clustered disproportionately at the bottom levels of our society. Therefore, this is a classic self-fulfilling prophecy. The losers are identified and excluded, and, being excluded, never gain the opportunity to become full participants. The bias is not always explicity or intended in the resistance to

school desegregation, but nevertheless it serves to perpetuate the cycle of dispair that has always been present for caste minorities.

Since 1635, and the creation of the Boston Public Latin School, the educational system in America has served to sort and select young people for roles in maintaining the society. A review of the several changes in public education since that time will reveal substantial improvement toward assuring well educated graduates. Concurrent with these changes has been a continuing saga of educational denial to large segments of the population. For the most part, this denial has been sanctioned by the people, especially those with primary responsibility for decision making. Overt and covert segregation has been the preferred strategy for containing persons regarded as caste minorities.

The schools have been regarded as the primary instrument of the alleged American melting pot which offers low-class students access to the mainstream. Charges today that the schools are failing low-class students, caste minorities, are not new. Public schools have always failed the lower classes. Current educational problems stem not from the fact that the schools have changed, but from the fact that they continue to do precisely the job that they have always done. The blueprint and itinerary are drawn by society, and schools simply implement that plan. The schools serve the function of being the primary selectors of the winners and losers in society. While education purports to provide equal opportunity, considerable evidence suggests that the ascribed status of society

is limiting for caste minorities.

If, however, schools are to be held responsible for implementing change, distinctions between what the schools can and cannot do must be stated. The schools are not wholly responsible for the dilemma, and schools cannot singlehandedly eradicate the wrongs that the society has created. The collections of the findings of all the disciplines must be combined to point the way towards giving individual human beings the opportunity to live the most satisfying and productive lives possible. The desegregated school is, however, the institution in the best position to assure this status. Desegregation is best defined as the removal of those barriers which perpetuate involuntary racial separation. By example, the separate but equal theory imposes racial segregation and fails to offer individual choice for school attendance. The political objective to desegregate is one to eliminate any law, provision or practice that requires isolation of a particular race in separate groups.

Voluntary desegregation plans have been developed in many school districts and the reduced isolation of students has been greatly enhanced. Despite this widespread practice, the presence of elusive practices and provisions of segregation exist. In a time of economic stringency it appears to many, both appropriate and convenient, for such policies to continue. Persons that support such policies do not view themselves as at variance with the federal mandate for desegregation. For twenty-seven years the levers of power—boards, educators and legislators—have served as accomplices in this national disgrace. Those that see wrong and fail to react

are as guilty as those that see right and fail to act. Desegregation and segregation cannot survive in juxtaposition. All of the variables in this matter are both the cause and effect of other variables. The essence of the matter must reign as the common target.

A popular diversion in this situation is the insistence by some that integregation is the intent of federal mandates. For example, it is feared that the recent investigations by the Office of Civil Rights at selected institutions of higher education may offer renewed impetus to those that value integregation. The future of traditionally black colleges are especially threatened by the movement of forced integregation operating under the guise of desegregation. Superficial transfer of students to other public schools is likewise viewed as suspect if true desegregation is to be achieved. The social and political decoys are well known in desegreation. Administrators and researchers alike are reminded of the new awareness throughout this land. The people, both black and white, are ready for a rapid solution to this lingering and exasperating problem of school attendance.

The most certain way to build confidence in the school desegregation process is to involve community citizens in the process. The work of "grass-root" community and neighborhood organizations is a vital component for successful school desegregation. Deep and concerned emotions must be stirred. Through the actions of advisory councils and other means, these individuals will revive public awareness of the benefits of desegregated schools. A straight-forward appeal to dispel myths and half-truths that cause fear, confusion and

chaos is required. Citizens experience extraordinary distress in situations that exlude such opportunities for involvement.

Watson believes that a major problem in education is the myth that education is apolitical.[5] Therefore, critics abound and blame the schools for not solving all of the social problems of the community. The urban agenda for the 1980's must focus on developing effective lines of communication between schools and homes. The nature of our society tends to segregate parents/adults from students, and schools must combat this tendency through aggressive and cooperative programming. The involvement of parents in the implementation phase of desegregation is a pivotal point for long-range success.

Discrimination in education feeds upon and in turn contributes to discrimination in housing. This complex dilemma requires that new approaches be developed for attacking the problems of racial and ethnic bias. It has been charged that desegregation has a detrimental effect on local communities, resulting in "white flight" and/or "middle-class flight," thus some noted critics of court-ordered, system-wide desegregation, such as James Coleman argue, instead for metropolitan remedies.[6]

Substantial evidence exists to suggest that current economic conditions have arrested the white flight syndrome. The costs of housing, interest, energy and transportation preclude the reckless movement to suburbia. The high cost of relocation will result in more stable neighborhoods and communities. Movement back to the city have already begun across the country and the prospects for continuation of this process are excellent. Therefore, many school

districts may well work toward new advantages in redistricting to achieve desegregation. The rearrangement of attendance boundaries will have the potential for far more desegregation than in previous years. For those that persist in running to avoid desegregation the penalties are high in terms of dollars, convenience and conscience.

Complete desegregation is the major step toward providing equal educational opportunity in the classroom, and in the real world. To settle for anything less in preparing young people for the challenges of adulthood would deny them of their inalienable rights. Administrators and researchers must present an unwavering personal commitment toward full compliance of school desegregation. In the urgent and perceptive words of Martin Luther King, NOW is the time.....

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